



PHOTO: ANTIQUITIES COALITION FOR USAID

PRESERVING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MINORITIES IN IRAQ

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- **Implementing Partners:** Antiquities Coalition with sub-awardees the Catholic Diocese of Mosul, the Centre Numérique des Manuscrits Orientaux (CNMO), the Syriac Heritage Museum in Erbil, and Yazda.
- **Duration:** May 2021 - May 2023
- **Total Estimated Assistance:** \$1 million
- **Locations:** Erbil, Dohuk, and Sinjar.

OVERVIEW

The ruthless campaigns led by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to destroy cultural artifacts and sites in northern Iraq between 2014 to 2018, seeking to erase Iraq's rich cultural and religious history and diversity, sent shockwaves across the globe. ISIS destroyed worship sites, including churches, mosques, shrines, and tombs, as well as museums and libraries. With minority communities

increasingly fragmented due to persecution, documenting their traditions digitally is crucial to preserving their heritage, rebuilding intercommunal understanding, and fostering communal healing and stability.

GOALS

USAID works with the Antiquities Coalition to train and equip local partners in documenting and digitizing heritage artifacts and activities, creating and organizing digital records, and data management. Digital documentation will preserve invaluable pieces of tangible and intangible cultural heritage while making them more accessible to local, regional, and international audiences. Furthermore, making these digitized antiquities accessible through online platforms can also facilitate identifying and repatriating missing objects.

KEY RESULTS

- Over 3,200 manuscripts digitized, covering more than 800 years of history in northern Iraq.
- Three videos of historical site documentation and eight videos of oral heritage, religious exercises, and stories recorded to preserve and present the cultural heritage of Yazidis in Iraq.
- Launching of the Ray of the Sun Program, an educational project to preserve Yazidi cultural heritage, in Sinjar, the historical homeland of the Yazidis.
- Three local civil society organizations (Yazda, Syriac Heritage Museum, and CNMO) trained on techniques of cultural preservation to establish local capacities that are led by ethnic and religious minorities targeted by ISIS.